

**First Adolescent Substance Abuse Conference:
“Confronting Social Barriers in Adolescence”**

Conference Speaker Information

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Laura Nelson, MD

Dr. Nelson joined the Arizona Department of Health Services/Division of Behavioral Health Services (ADHS/DBHS) in September 2005 and currently serves as the Acting Deputy Director. Previously, she has served as the Chief Medical Officer. Through her leadership, Dr. Nelson strives to further Arizona’s vision for a behavioral health system that is recovery-oriented, consumer-focused, family and culturally friendly, and outcome-based. She represents the Department on the Arizona Substance Abuse Partnership (ASAP) and is committed to increasing the capacity and quality of substance abuse prevention and treatment services in Arizona.

Dr. Nelson has been actively involved in the oversight of Arizona’s Jason K Settlement Agreement which is aimed at transforming the behavioral health system of care for children and youth across the state. She has also been deeply involved with the Arnold vs. Sarn lawsuit in Maricopa County, which addresses the recovery needs of individuals with Serious Mental Illness.

Prior to coming to ADHS/DBHS, Dr. Nelson served as the Associate Medical Director and Quality Management Administrator at the Arizona Department of Economic Security/Division of Developmental Disabilities (ADES/DDD). During that time, she made significant improvements to the Divisions’ quality management/utilization management system, while she also provided statewide consultation and local outpatient treatment services to individuals with co-occurring developmental disabilities and behavioral health issues. Resulting from this experience, Dr. Nelson now provides consultation to the U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division for investigations of residential institutions for individuals with developmental disabilities.

A native of South Carolina, Dr. Nelson traveled to Middlebury, Vermont to complete her undergraduate work at Middlebury College, where she majored in Biology. She then returned to South Carolina to attend medical school at the Medical University of South Carolina. Upon completion of her psychiatric residency at Banner Good Samaritan Hospital in Phoenix, she dedicated her practice to public behavioral health, including both inpatient work at Maricopa Integrated Health System and outpatient work at a local community clinic. She has served as the Director of the Consultation Liaison service and the Director of the Electroconvulsive Therapy service at Maricopa Integrated Health System.

Dr. Nelson is married to her husband, Joel Tranter, a Sergeant with the Phoenix Police Department, and they live in Phoenix with their two cats.